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ABSTRACT

A study was done to explore the views and perspectives of seven exemplary public school, African American teachers on school restructuring efforts previously undertaken and currently underway in their respective school districts and schools. The study was conducted through semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face interviews lasting between 2 and 4 hours interviews with African American teachers from seven urban areas of the nation, many of whom worked in schools with a high proportion of minority and at-risk students. All of the teachers were chosen by community nomination as a result of direct contact with African American communities. The data reveal that teachers exhibit three patterns of involvement and attitudes toward district-wide and individual school restructuring efforts: cynical dissenters, coincidental cooperators, and committed advocates. Other findings include the following: (1) experienced teachers were most skeptical, most reluctant, and least likely to be involved in school reform efforts compared to less experienced teachers; (2) teachers' election to participate rested on their perceptions of consistent fair administrators and the possibility for faculty to develop shared goals and culture; (3) a need to understand the historical context of schools; and (4) greater teacher participation in reform occurs where there are multiple and varied chances for involvement. Included are 24 references. (JB)

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# URBAN AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS' VIEWS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: SPECULATIONS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF EXEMPLARY TEACHERS

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**Introduction**

One response spawned by the educational reform movement of the 1980s has been the various restructuring efforts undertaken at elementary, middle and high schools. Despite multiple definitions and forms of implementation, restructuring is currently viewed as a solution to unacceptably low levels of student achievement. There have been three common approaches to restructuring. The first has involved governance -- moving resources and decision-making from the central office directly to the schools. Restructuring efforts such as these are currently underway in the Chicago, Dade County and the Rochester Public Schools. In Chicago this has meant creating school-site management teams composed of parents, teachers, and community members who are expected to assume the responsibility for allocating funds, hiring and firing principals and deciding on the allocation of teaching positions. The Philadelphia Schools Collaborative, a citywide school restructuring project currently underway in the City's 25 comprehensive high schools is deliberately linking changes in school governance to improving the educational outcomes for students. The reason underlying decentralization is the assumption that those closest to the day to day operation of schools -- teachers and parents -- are those in best position to determine and implement the kind of changes that will actually improve student achievement. A second approach to restructuring acknowledges the interlocking intellectual and social needs of students. This option involves providing on-site services to students or delivering student services through partnerships formed with community service agencies. Directly altering students' learning experiences -- eliminating tracking, and creating cooperative groups -- is a third approach to restructuring. Despite the promise held out by restructuring, it remains unclear which of the institutional modifications will be most successful in fostering authentic achievement, promoting educational equity and accountability, whether these alterations will be sustained, and which combinations will realize optimum gains for students.

This article explores the views and perspectives of seven exemplary African-American teachers on school restructuring efforts previously undertaken and currently underway in their respective school districts and schools. Like Johnson's (1990) study of exemplary teachers, I have chosen to interview individuals considered above average teachers by their nominators. My study differs from hers, however, in that the nominated teachers are all African-Americans who have been selected by individuals and organizations from within that community. Two factors have influenced my decisions. First, not only is it my belief school systems need to retain outstanding teachers because it is from them that we can learn the most, but that as a society we ought to be concerned about insuring the twin goals of seeking and maintaining a diverse teaching force and improving educational outcomes for those students currently least well served by existing schools. Second, despite the fact that all teachers have been blamed for the current state of education, African-American teachers seem to have received less praise and a disproportionate share of criticism than other groups of teachers at precisely the same time that their declining numbers have merited the concern of policymakers (Foster, 1991a).

In an attempt to understand how these teachers view current restructuring efforts, this study analyzes patterns of teacher participation in school restructuring efforts and examines several factors that encourage or deter them from participating in such efforts. Other studies have examined these issues with individual and groups of teachers, but this study differs from them in that it focuses exclusively on the views of seven African-American teachers, who have witnessed a series of reform initiatives, have outlasted several generations of leadership, and who have a long term perspective on the political, historical and sociological changes in schools and the larger community.

**Methodology**

Though the teachers interviewed for this study are diverse with respect to gender, years of experience, region of country, grade level and subject taught, all are African-Americans currently employed in urban school districts -- New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Diego, Los Angeles, St. Louis and Dade County Florida -- in schools that serve low-income students, many which by current definitions would be classified "at risk". Four of them work in schools where African-American students make up over 85 per cent of the student body, one teaches in a school where more than 75 percent of the student body is Latino and Black -- African or Caribbean-American -- and two work in schools where although students of color constitute the majority , African-American students make up less than 20 per cent of the student body. Although the racial make-up of the faculties varied tremendously, all of the teachers worked in schools where faculty of color were less than 50 percent.[1] Though only two of the teachers live in same vicinity as the school, most have been working in the same school district and school for more than a decade. In fact, five of them are now teaching their second generation of students -- the sons, daughters, nieces and nephews of former students.

All of the teachers were chosen by community nomination. Community nomination, a term coined by this author specifically for this study, means that teachers were chosen by direct contact with African-American communities. Periodicals, community organizations and individuals provided the names of the teachers.[2] Though corroboration by institutions or agencies outside the Black community was not sought, two of the teachers have been local

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[1]Their years of teaching range from 8-30 years with an average of 22 years of service. Three are male, and four female. Two elementary school teachers are female, one male teaches middle school, and four, 2 males and 2 females, teach grades 9-12. Middle and high school subject matter specialties include English, social studies and science. One respondent has a doctorate, two possess masters degrees and the rest all have substantial coursework above the bachelors degree. Five grew up in communities and attended schools that were segregated by law, and all except two earned their bachelors degrees at historically Black colleges.

[2]For further discussion of community nomination, see, Foster 1990, 1991a,b.

or state teachers of the year. Another, nominated by a professional football player and former student, was recently honored as an exemplary teacher by the National Football League. This teacher was also a National Humanities Faculty member for several years. A fourth has created and sustained an after school, weekend, and summer program that over 20 years has prepared and placed Black students in private boarding schools.

Using semi-structured, open-ended face-to-face interviews lasting between 2-4 hours, I talked with all of the respondents for this study at least once between September 1990-June 1991. The teachers were asked about their background, asked to describe the school, and the community it served, questioned about the socioeconomic and ethnic makeup of the students and faculty, and asked to describe the changes that had taken place in the school and community over the years. In short, they were asked to describe their school and community and how they had come to be the way they are today. They were also asked to characterize their relationships with the various constituencies in their schools and communities -- administrators, colleagues, parents and students. Each teacher was read a list of 38 indicators used to assess the extent to which a school is restructured, and asked to identify which of these were currently underway in their districts and schools (Center on Restructuring, 1991). Teachers were also questioned about their attitudes toward current school restructuring. In addition, I obtained data on teachers' attitudes toward and involvement in previous reform efforts. Last, they were queried about the kind of changes they believed would improve teachers' worklife and asked to assess whether these changes would improve student engagement and learning. All of the interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded. All of the teachers seemed at ease and all spoke at length. This ease is probably due to the fact that as part of a larger on-going study, most of them were being interviewed for a second or third time.

**Findings**

All of the teachers work in school districts engaged in some form of restructuring, and five teach in schools where some restructuring efforts are underway. Responding to the list of 38 criteria, teachers identified five elements across the four dimensions. Two indicators categorized under student experiences, and one in each of the remaining categories -- the professional life of teachers, leadership, management and governance and coordination of community services -- were identified. Teachers from Dade County and Chicago reported that management teams responsible for developing improvement plans and charged with increasing teacher and parent participation in establishing schoolwide policy, had been organized. Teachers from two other cities observed that similar management teams had been created in some schools in their districts, but not in their schools. Three teachers mentioned restructuring activities that spoke directly to student experiences. In two high schools teachers related to students as mentors, and in one the school was coordinating students' health, child care and other human service needs. A teacher from Los Angeles mentioned that in her school, a teacher-student mentoring program had been established. A St. Louis high school teacher reported a similar mentoring program , as well as a project that was attempting to coordinate services to students. A San Diego teacher noted that

because tracking had been abolished, and a policy implemented requiring all students to complete a standard curriculum, students in her high school were spending a large percentage of their time in heterogeneous classes.

In no case, were more than two criteria identified as ongoing in any school, which suggests that the amount of restructuring, at least the amount the teachers were aware of, was minimal. In general, teachers perceived the primary focus of school restructuring efforts at both the district and individual school level to be on governance and management issues. Even teachers who were directly involved with other types of interventions -- serving as adult mentors or advisors -- rarely connected them to a larger continuing restructuring effort.

The data reveal that teachers exhibit three patterns of involvement. Based on their degree of involvement as well as their stated attitudes toward districtwide and individual school restructuring efforts, I have labeled them *cynical dissenters, coincidental cooperators*, and *committed advocates*. A group of three teachers with long tenure in their respective school systems, the *cynical dissenters* were not involved in restructuring efforts at the time of their interviews although all reported to have participated in past innovations of various kinds. Though all of the teachers from this first group are employed in districts where restructuring efforts are currently underway, at the time of their interviews, two of this group were teaching in schools without any form of restructuring. In actuality, only one teacher from this group had the opportunity to become personally involved. The second group of three teachers, the *coincidental cooperators*, was involved in carrying out parts of the restructuring plan without necessarily being aware of the scope of restructuring plan, how their innovation fit into a larger plan or having been involved in the decision making or planning process. Only one teacher was a *committed advocate*. Less experienced, than either the cynical resisters or the coincidental cooperators, this teacher was actively involved in school restructuring efforts as a member of a site-based management team of her elementary school in Dade County for 6 years. At the time the interview was conducted, she had left her original school to become a founding member of a new alternative school designed especially for "at risk" students.

Even though this article focuses on African-American teachers, their reactions may or may not be explained by their membership in this particular cultural group. A given teacher's reaction to organizational change could be explained by a number of factors. It is possible, for example, that the experiences that result from a teacher's racial and cultural background could cause them to respond to organizational change in similar ways. It may also be the case that teachers' reactions could result from institutional, not cultural or individual, factors. Teachers might disagree with expending energy on particular kinds of reforms, governance, as opposed to mentoring or improving their pedagogy, for example. Or teachers might resist innovations that are that are instituted from the top down. It is likely that a number of factors -- teachers' personal and cultural biographies, the institutional history including the cycle of institutional reforms -- interact to produce teachers' reactions. While this paper does not discount the influence that similar cultural background can have on teacher's responses to organizational change, it argues that in addition this, opportunities

to become involved in restructuring, and teachers' willingness to invest in institutional change through current school restructuring efforts, depend on a number of internal and external factors. Some of these include historical context of the school, the perceived responsiveness of proposed changes to community needs, and the correspondence between the teachers' philosophical and political orientations and the efforts underway. This article aims to increase our understanding of the ways that these conditions may interact to create the circumstances that facilitate or inhibit teachers' inclination to participate in school restructuring efforts.

**Cynical Dissenters**

As noted earlier, none of the teachers in this group was involved in restructuring efforts of any kind. All of the teachers reported that their schools were unsuccessful with the overwhelming majority of African-American students and catalogued a variety of negative factors--high student and faculty absenteeism, student and teacher alienation and disinterest high failure, suspension and drop-out rates -- to support their assessment. But all could point to individual teachers, including themselves, who were successful despite these conditions, and most considered themselves more successful in gaining students' cooperation and engaging them in academic work than most of their colleagues.

The three teachers in this group all reported that they have strained relationships with administrators as well as colleagues. A 31-year veteran teacher in a Chicago high school and a 5-year participant in the Maine Humanities Summer Program for gifted and talented students, commented that he had always had a "love-hate" relationships with the school administration. He noted that over the years the school administration has consistently been resistant to accepting ideas from him or other successful teachers about how to improve students behavior and academic achievement. But he added that principals routinely transfer students considered "difficult and incorrigible" to his classes and always send visitors to his classroom "to see what can be accomplished with "students from the projects." More than one teacher remarked that their teaching approaches are considered "old-fashioned," "inappropriate," "too strict," and "rigid" by both colleagues and the administrators.

As a group they disagreed over the bases of the criticism, but individual teachers offered personal explanations for the fault finding. Two suspected that jealousy fueled the criticism. But all three agreed that teachers and administrators have an interest in maintaining the status quo and as a result pressure dissenters to conform to the social order. One respondent reasoned that by accepting these commonsense explanations teachers no longer have to search for solutions, their ability to perceive the actual basis for others' success is clouded, and successful teachers, who do not buy into these commonsense explanations represent a threat to the accepted social order.

> We (teachers) see one succeed and, rather than trying to understand the basis of their success, we try to tear down. In my school there is a culture of failure, against success and doing well, for kids and teachers. There's a kind

of peer pressure to maintain the status quo -- In that sense, the teachers are just like the kids, they put pressure on other teachers to go along with the program. The teachers and the principal complain that I'm too hard on the kids, that I expect too much from kids from the projects, that these kids can't learn. But these kids are me. They are my future and the future of the Black community. If you are a maverick, if you are successful with students, if students not only do well in your classes but seem to enjoy learning, then as a teacher you don't fit in with the norms and expectations in this school. It's sad, but if you want to be successful in my school, you have to isolate yourself, be a loner. Otherwise, you'll find yourself drowning in a sea of mediocrity. And as mad as I am about teaching, I just can't accept that for my kids or myself. The other teachers don't realize that one has to work hard for what one gets. If you are going to succeed in the classroom or anywhere else, you have to work for -- I work for mine. I mean I work hard. Because I don't believe in spending the entire year frustrated. You know, 'the kids are not learning this. They're not learning that.'

**Coincidental Cooperators**

The second group of teachers were involved in carrying out particular aspects of school reform efforts. Two served as mentors in organized schoolwide mentoring programs. As the result of a central office decision requiring that all students be exposed to a standard curriculum, a third was teaching American Literature to a heterogeneous group of 11th graders. Like the first group, these teachers also felt alienated from the schools' goals, values, and colleagues. In one sense, this group could be characterized as good citizens. However, despite seemingly different participation patterns between the two groups, in actuality, both were functioning in roles which focused on students, not on the school, as an organization. What distinguishes the cynical dissenters from the coincidental cooperators is that the latter were able to participate in the school's programs in ways that corresponded to their views and predispositions.

From what teachers in this groups said, other than pairing mentors and protegees, the school offered little in the way of guidance or support, but correspondingly, besides an expressed commitment to serving as a mentor, it required little else of the teachers. With little structure, teachers were free to develop and shape their relationships with students in any manner they deemed appropriate.

One teacher paired with five students, who were originally members of her freshman advisory class, had followed the same students for three years . Since this teacher called her students at their homes on a regular basis, she often called her protegees as well. Responsive to issues other than academic ones, she would sometimes inquire about family or social issues. However, her primary interest was students' intellectual development. She monitored classroom progress, discussed various career options, explained high school

courses required for graduation as well as for entry in various careers, and assisted with course selection. One of her objectives was exposing students to resources available in the city. She took students to the library, insisted they acquire a library card, and helped them select library books on topics of interest. A science teacher, she also invited her protegees to accompany her and other students on regular trips to the zoo, the science museum, or medical school laboratories. She made them aware of and encouraged to them to participate in after school and Saturday enrichment programs, such as Upward Bound Programs, or in a Saturday science enrichment program at a local university where she was a teacher. Also a mentor, the second teacher who worked in a year round high school, emphasized cultural rather than academic issues. A proficient dancer with extensive interests in the cultural arts, this teacher had established a small after-school and Saturday arts program. For 4 years with the support of the school administration, she had organized a school dance troupe, produced plays, and directed performances for school assemblies. Thus, while participating in the mentoring program required assuming additional responsibilities, for these two teachers, it did not require a major change in the way they related to their colleagues or the school. Both regularly spent time with individual students and had organized and taken trips with students on a formal and informal basis. For these teachers, participation in the school restructuring efforts was facilitated because of the match between their personal inclinations and the requirements of the mentoring program.

Although the third teacher was participating in aspects of the school reform efforts, she was far more critical of the innovations than the other teachers from this group. In order to comply with the central office mandate of a standard curriculum for all students, the third teacher was forced to stop teaching a special course in World Literature she had developed and taught for 6 years to underachieving students. These students not only volunteered, but arrived at school one hour before it began just to take the course. Though she had agreed to teach the newly mandated course, she noted that she had enjoyed teaching underachieving students and conceded that much of her feelings of satisfaction came from many years of achieving success with students whom others found difficult to teach. She pointed with pride to the large number of students who had returned to regular classes after participating in her course for one or two semesters. Her comments demonstrated that she was familiar with the literature on tracking and that she understood the negative effects. Nonetheless, she also questioned the wisdom and reasoning behind the unilateral decision to place students in heterogeneous classrooms with the standard curriculum fare.

> I've read all the research on tracking and I know what it says. But that research is talking about what generally happens. It isn't true in all instances and it didn't reflect what went on in my classroom. There are some underachieving kids that do benefit from being in heterogeneous classes with certain teachers under certain conditions. And there are some kids who benefit from being in classes with kids like themselves with certain teachers under certain conditions. It doesn't make sense for someone to make a decision to put underachieving students in classrooms and assume that they

> will do well. It's much more complex than that. There are a lot of other factors -- the teachers, the curriculum. It's possible that even in the classroom where the curriculum is enriched and the teaching aimed at high achieving students, that the low achieving kids will be overlooked. There are teachers who will be able to make it work, but they are probably the same teachers who were successful with the kids when they were tracked. So as far as I am concerned, they haven't necessarily changed anything for the kids. They changed the form, but not necessarily the substance, the structures, but not necessarily the outcome. I object to the idea that's so prevalent in education that one style fits all. Some kids may need different exposure and experiences to reach the same goal.

This teacher understood the conditions that gave rise to the central office directive mandating that all students be assigned heterogeneously without regard to ability. She agreed moreover, with the central office's attempt to provide equal access for all students to particular content and objectives. But, she felt that this decision would not automatically make classroom instruction more equitable for the students for whom it was designed. In her view, attempts to equalize instruction in this way not only disregarded, but denied her professional judgement in determining the best way to interact with her students. Consequently, in terms of this teacher's professional competence, instructional creativity, and personal satisfaction, the central office decision was a costly one.

**Committed Advocate**

Betty Jones, the only teacher to describe herself as actively involved in school reform and to believe that these efforts held out some promise for improving schools, works in Dade County. Though in her early 40s, close in age to some of the younger teachers interviewed, in contrast to them, Jones had only been teaching 8 years. She had entered the profession after more than a decade of working as an occupational therapist. Her desire to become involved in the site-based management team and her commitment to it was enhanced by the fact that she had requested and been placed in the elementary school she had attended as a child -- one attended by the children of many friends and relatives.

As indicated earlier, she reported much more collegial interactions with other teachers around school related issued. However, during her 6 years tenure as a member of the site-based management team, she experienced countless frustrations, impasses, and conflicts in trying to shape the school into one which conformed to her vision of a good school. Much of her frustration came from the slow pace of change, the inability to reach consensus on school goals, clashes in educational philosophies among groups of faculty, different beliefs about what was best for children from the community, misunderstandings and misperceptions of the school, parents and community, and what she called the continuing search for "the way, the truth, and the light." After 6 years as a member of the site-based management team, she left to become a founding member of a new school designed for "at-risk" students.

From Ms. Jones' perspective, there were three phases in the development and negotiations of the site-based management team, which proceeded inductively from solving the specific problems to tackling broader issues. During the first phase, which lasted one year, discussions about resources -- supplies, textbooks, xerox machines -- dominated the conversations. Though she conceded that securing enough supplies was sometimes problematic, Ms. Jones reported being frustrated over the fact that in the beginning the group spent far too much time haggling about supplies, textbooks and xeroxing, and complaining that lack of them interfered with their instructional effectiveness. She explained:

> I was upset because we must have spent an entire year talking about supplies, mostly more textbooks, workbooks, and more money for xeroxing. Most people on the team seemed to believe that all we needed was more, and so discussion was always about how to get more, but more of what, the same. A couple of us felt that the most important issue wasn't getting more of the same, but maybe using the money in a different way to get different kinds of materials. Personally, I believed that one of the biggest problems was that too many teachers relied on commercial packages, on textbooks, workbooks or xerox copies, on someone else's ideas instead of on your own and what was best for your kids. But there weren't many teachers who felt the way I did and was it was hard to get that idea across.

Eventually the team proposed a solution, voted on and accepted by the entire faculty. Teachers would be given a specific amount to purchase supplies for their classroom, and the rest set aside for common needs to be decided by faculty vote. Jones thought the decision a good compromise, but she was disappointed that the solution missed the opportunity to discuss deeper issues about the relationship between curriculum and textbooks.

The second phase focused on structural changes in the school program. During the second year, after reviewing and visiting many elementary school programs, much deliberation, and consultation with the faculty, the school reorganized into multi-graded multi-age teams of different age/grade combinations. Once the school was reorganized, workshops on teaching methods would follow. According to Jones, the idea was to get started changing the school instead of merely talking about change. She was an enthusiastic supporter of the multi-age and multigrade classroom and convinced it would work because it would reduce excessive number of repeaters, especially African-American students, in the early grades, and that by staying with the same group of teachers throughout a two to three year period, students wouldn't "have to waste all their time at the beginning of each year sizing up and testing the teacher." Finally, she liked the concept because it reminded her of her own days in the segregated schools where a family atmosphere dominated the school, "where teachers wanted you to do well, weren't afraid of you, weren't afraid to guide you, try to help you solve problems, to praise you when you were right and tell when you were wrong."

In the third year, the school began a new program. With high expectations for success, Jones began team teaching in a first, second and third grade combination with six- seven- and eight-year olds. For 4 years, while she worked with the same team members, faculty attended workshops on teaching methods -- cooperative learning, the writing process approach to teaching writing, the language experience approach to teaching reading, and other teaching approaches. Despite these structural changes and the on-going workshops, Jones reported that sharp divisions, usually along philosophical lines, plagued the school faculty. The teams were assembled without regard to educational philosophy or approaches to classroom management. Jones felt that there was a bias toward progressive philosophies of education, "if you weren't doing certain things or using particular approaches in your classroom, even if your kids were doing well, you weren't in the 'in-group'." For Jones, the most serious conflicts concerned styles of classroom management and discipline. A number of teachers had problems with discipline and the stronger members of the team, often African-American teachers, were forced to act as disciplinarians usually for African-American students that were difficult to handle. Ms. Jones respected her colleagues and believed her educational philosophy and teaching methods congruent with theirs, but because she was better able to handle the more recalcitrant students, she became the disciplinarian in her team. She tried to shed the role by helping other teachers learn different ways of handling students, but she felt that her attempts were usually ignored, and that she was accused of betraying the progressive ideology by "being too old fashioned, too mean, and too hard on the kids."

Because of the conflict, after 4 years, Ms. Jones left the school to become a founding member of a new school where she hopes to exercise much greater influence and control in shaping the school, and choosing faculty who can agree on a shared vision and shared ideas about educational philosophy, approaches to classroom management, and discipline. In retrospect, Ms. Jones concluded that though the concept of team teaching was worthwhile, most of the problems came about by trying to change a school without first developing a common vision and engaging in preliminary discussions about educational philosophies and approaches to discipline.

> I think that in order to teach in a situation like that, you have really got to know your teammates. I worked with two people, one male and one female, whose philosophy of education, our approach to learning was the same, but our view and approach to handling the kids was different. Their philosophy was -- 'If Johnny doesn't feel like reading today, we're not going to make Johnny read, because if we make Johnny do those things, Johnny's not going to enjoy them, and Johnny won't learn from those things.' My philosophy is --Johnny's got one strike against him already because Johnny is Black, so when he comes to school, he is going to read, whether he wants to or not, because his mother has sent him to school, and number two, if he can't read, he's going to have two strikes against him! Right? These two other people on my team were just like -- let the kids do what they want when they want to do it. Well, of course, they all wanted to play and have free time, they were only six-

> seven- and eight-year olds. And the way things were set up they could do what they wanted to and behave the way they wanted. To some extent I agree with that, but the school experience was too new for our kids, they did not know how to make choices -- at the least the ones the teachers expected them to make -- and when some of them just got too hard to handle, then I had to step in and become the enforcer. It was mass confusion. So, that was basically the difference in our philosophy, not the kinds of activities we thought were good for kids, but in our philosophy about how to deal with kids.

Despite differences among the three groups of teachers, there are a number of issues that appear so consistently across the interviews that they are addressed here. The first of these issues concerns the teachers' educational philosophy, a theme mentioned by all seven teachers. According to them, this issue acts as a barrier to getting involved and staying involved in school reform efforts. Asked to characterize their educational philosophies, all of the teachers provided detailed descriptions which indicate responsive, flexible, and progressive instructional styles, but exacting standards of behavior. When they talked about their classrooms, each emphasized instructional strategies -- depth of understanding rather than coverage of material, teaching how rather than what to think, applying concepts rather than stressing memorization, and relating school material to students' personal experiences -- that characterize authentic instruction (Newmann, 1988; Sizer, 1984). At the same time, however, these teachers portray their classrooms as environments where rules for behavior are unambiguous and students are held accountable for adhering to them. Respecting the teacher and other students, coming to class on time, completing assignments are explicit and non-negotiable demands. Quick to point out that they do not seek order for order's sake, these teachers depict environments where respect, trust, and cooperation allow students to concentrate on academic learning, and without which all contend authentic instruction is severely compromised.

Though particular aspects of this teaching style, as well as students' responses to it, have been described in the literature, analyses of its influence on student learning have not systematically been undertaken (Delpit 1988; Foster, 1987). The teaching style described in the literature and the teachers' self-depictions resemble the authoritative parenting style reported in the literature, a style that incorporates high degrees of acceptance and involvement, firm control and psychological autonomy (Dornbusch, Ritter, Liederman, Roberts & Fraleigh, 1987).

The research literature on teachers' workplace identifies a number of factors that contribute to the quality of teachers' work life. Among these factors are professional interaction and collegial relationship, mutual trust, and a sense of community (Little, 1982). Research on successful schools also confirms the salience of these factors. According to this literature, faculty in successful schools are more likely than their counterparts in less successful institutions to interact in collegial and professional relationships, possess shared goals and a positive sense of community (Bryk & Driscoll 1988; Chubb & Moe 1989; Lightfoot, 1983). Despite these findings the research is silent about the internal and external

conditions that promote or constrain these factors or the processes by which they are developed and sustained (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1990).

All seven of the teachers reported that their relationships with colleagues were difficult and strained. Unsatisfactory relationships resulted not only from the current school climate, but seemed to have been influenced by the history of the school, what Louis and Miles (1990) refer to as a school's "deep history," as well as the previous political context. Four teachers with long tenure in urban school systems maintained that some of the current problems and tensions had originated and were fueled by the long and bitter teacher actions of the late 1960s and 1970s. These four teachers had refused to honor these strikes, not because they disagreed with union demands for greater compensation and benefits, but because they believed the strikes created obstacles to improved school community relationships in the African-American community by denying African-American children access to schooling and thwarting the community's attempts to secure greater control of their children's education. Instead these teachers sided with what they felt were the Black community's interests. One teacher who expressed this point of view commented,

> The unions were responsible for getting benefits, salaries, and things like that started. I joined, but I never struck. They have had many strikes while I have been here, but I never went out on strike. But I would never cross their picket lines. What I would do was go to school before the picket lines started and wait until after school then when they left, then I would leave. Well, that was respect for them. But, I felt loyalty to the Black community and I just didn't feel that as a Black teacher I should strike and deny Black kids the chance to go to school. The school had to stay open as far as I was concerned. The kids had to be taught. And it seemed to me that the unions were trying to gain power by denying Blacks control over their schools and their children's education. As far as that went, I identified with the Black community.

Not all of the teachers were as explicit as this one about the struggles between union and African-American community interests, but consistent with the findings from other research, most expressed loyalty, commitment, and connectedness to Black student and community interests over union and institutional ones (Foster, 1991a,1991b; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1991; Murrell, 1991).

All six of the teachers from the first two groups -- cynical dissenters and the coincidental cooperators -- described themselves as outside both the friendship and collegial groups that existed in their schools. Only two of these teachers said they would have preferred more contact with colleagues, especially around substantive and intellectual issues. One of them, a high school teacher described the isolation and alienation he felt:

> It's a little lonely out there. It's frustrating in the sense that--let's say you read a good book and no one there has read that book for you to discuss it with.

> You're alienated towards the your school and colleagues. A bit melancholy. It's frustrating. It's sad, but not weeping sad. That's why I use the word melancholy. It's frustrating because you can't communicate. But, it can be very painful sometimes.

Despite these teachers' expressed wish for more collegial relationships, all six stated that they chose isolation because when it came to matters of student achievement and discipline, they felt they had little in common with their colleagues, whose expectations corresponded to institutional norms, but which as a group they regarded as unacceptably low. Betty Jones, the teacher who participated on the shared governance team, also characterized herself as outside the friendship groups. Unlike teachers in the other two groups, however, she reported much greater contact with colleagues around school related issues, which may be because she had committed herself to the organization.

While acknowledging that the escalating social problems confronting their communities -- unemployment, teenage pregnancy, drugs, crime, family instability, and negative peer pressure--made teaching more difficult and demanding than when they first began, six teachers concluded that most urban schools, and the teachers that staffed them, had simply abdicated their responsibilities toward the pupils. Half of them reasoned, that in order to save face and justify years of neglecting the education of particular groups of students, schools and entire faculties bolstered by research, had created elaborate commonsense explanations for their realities, which are accepted by society and permeate most urban schools. Since their personal classroom experiences differed from the majority of their colleagues, whom most perceived to have lost the commitment to teaching, these teachers reported feeling alienated.

Being surrounded by dispirited and apathetic colleagues has caused some of these teachers to develop strategies for coping. Describing themselves as "loners" or "islands in a sea of mediocrity", three teachers reported that they consciously isolate themselves, avoiding teachers' lounges or other places where negative conversations about students, and the futility of trying to teach them, usually prevail. A 1978 state science teacher of the year and department chair for 15 years commented that in leadership courses, she had learned that one approach to handling negative comments by colleagues was to try to persuade them to change their attitudes. But, she commented, "I don't go in there, because number one, I don't want to hear all that negative talk. It upsets me and I can't do my work. I don't have the time for it." Other teachers do not avoid places where colleagues congregate; instead they choose to challenge cynical colleagues even at the risk of strained relationships. A California teacher of year noted that at first, when she overheard conversations which berated African-American students and their families, invented excuses for low achievement or implied lowered expectations for African-American students, she ignored them. After a few months of listening to these negative exchanges, she finally voiced her disagreement. "Now, I've established myself as a presence and nobody would ever say things like that if I'm in the room."

Not all of the teachers interviewed were as pessimistic about colleagues. One indicated that he sought out, formed personal relationships and participated on committees and extra curricular activities with like-minded teachers. Another noted, that on an informal basis, with no encouragement from the administration, he observed competent colleagues and learned effective strategies from them in less personal ways. Others sought professional development activities and collegial relationships outside the school. Three mentioned being engaged in on-going professional development activities that take place outside of the respective workplaces. An English teacher was involved in national project to identify gifted and talented Blacks -- students generally overlooked using standard assessment measures. This same teacher actively participated in literature and writing projects at the prestigious university located in the city. Another teacher, mentioned earlier, interacted and shared professional ideas with teachers of the same mind, who worked with him in the after-school and Saturday enrichment program he directed. A science teacher made frequent visits to the science museum, the zoo, and spent time in the research laboratories at a local teaching hospital, where she interacted with non-teaching science professionals just to enhance her own learning. Often, on her own, she arranged to have students accompany her on these Saturday field trips.

Despite the existence of informal relationships with some colleagues, most of what the teachers from these two groups said suggested that deep fissures existed between themselves and their colleagues, and all reported feeling alienated from their schools. Taken together, these conditions made teachers reluctant to participate in reform efforts. Instead of participating in schools which do not conform to their personal goals visions and goals, they have chosen to concentrate their efforts on developing their own personal relationships with their students. Because their personal commitment to students overshadows any obligation they feel to the institution, except for their contact with students, four have simply withdrawn from participating in the school as an organization, to avoid what one teacher said were "all the unhappy moments that take place outside the classroom."

The interviews provide evidence that these six teachers view current reforms with skepticism. Their skepticism was based on their experience with previous reforms. All six of them questioned whether changes in governance, what one teacher called "talking about change instead of doing it," would improve student achievement. They also noted that participating in such activities was not only time consuming, but would divert attention away from teachers' primary obligation and have little impact on instruction. Based on his experiences in previous innovations, a high school English teacher contended that in his school "most of the talkers are not doers."

All of them believed these efforts would not be permanent nor result in fundamental change. They viewed these as temporary measures that might result in some curricular, structural, and organizational changes, but which would not substantially affect student achievement. Pointing to the numerous innovations implemented earlier in at the school and district levels, they questioned whether the changes generated by the current wave of reforms would be long lasting. Having seen superintendents, district superintendents,

curriculum coordinators and principals, each bringing new approaches and building infrastructures to support them come and go, most have little faith that these newest reforms will be sustained. An elementary teacher observed:

> In my 30 odd years, I've seen it all -- multicultural curriculum approaches, standardized curriculum with pacing guides, phonics-based reading series, the linguistic approach to reading, new math, open classrooms, learning stations, multi-graded classrooms, kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs. In my school you could still find little bits and pieces of all of those programs. And I bet downtown is full of all the administrators that were brought in to oversee all these changes. Every five years it's something new, some new program, some new technique, some new discovery that's going to jump start the kids, and revolutionize the schools. We go through the motions -- have workshops, get a bunch of memos from superintendents, curriculum coordinators and principals. Some money is spent -- there are summer workshops, in-service programs. But the efforts don't last long, we never know whether what happened actually made a difference in the kids' performance -- or we decide that the tests we have don't measure what we want to know. After we spend all this time learning about some new approach, do the kids actually read or do math better, enjoy reading or doing math more? When I look back over the years, very little ever happens that makes a difference, so then we abandon what we started, and start something new.

Fragmented by the multiple demands on their time and energy, few teachers were willing to invest in activities that did not have immediate payoffs and that in their view, were unrelated to student learning. One teacher commented, "Who is going to be working with my students while I'm off attending meeting after meeting. It's taken a lot of work to get my students to the point where they are eager to work and I can't afford to be absent."

Besides insufficient time, two teachers commented that poor leadership, or varying conceptions about effective leadership,which they attributed to different life experiences of teachers, made it difficult to build cohesiveness among faculty members. A high school teacher reported that the faculty in his school had clashed over the effectiveness of a principal, which he attributed to different value systems and conflicting notions about appropriate interaction styles. According to this teacher, African-Americans preferred the principal's direct style while whites considered it authoritarian and rigid. Another high school teacher expressed displeasure with her school principal's poor leadership. She complained of his tendency to accede to the wishes of powerful, usually white, faculty groups even if decisions were unethical and not in the best interest of the school. As an example, she recounted the principal's decision to hold two separate faculty meetings to accommodate the few vocal faculty members who complained that the meetings interfered with their after-school activities. And she described a faculty meeting in which this same principal agreed to change the site of parent teacher conferences, holding them in the gym instead of the classrooms, because "some teachers were afraid that parents might become violent," even

though there was no past history to support this fear. She commented that early in her career, teachers and administrators demonstrated a greater commitment to students and made greater efforts to get parents involved. Whether accurate or not, this teacher remembered a period when the common background of faculty, parents, and students resulted in an ethic of caring, community cohesiveness, and cultural solidarity in her school community:

> We had about 2,500 students and we had about 125 teachers. Many of the students didn't go to class, and they tried to do exactly what they wanted to do, just like they do now. But, you had a lot more teachers that insisted that the students had to come to class. And if they didn't, they did just what I do now. We'd call and check on you. I would go to some administrator, some of those administrators at that time were a little stronger than these. We'd just write a little note and send it back. They would start getting on your case. When Pruitt Igo (a housing project) was there, we used to take the PTA down there. So you took the PTA meeting to the parents. We the teachers, we would go there, in the community room and have PTA meetings. Now there are fewer Black teachers, and more white teachers and we seem to disagree about a lot more things. Last week, a few of them managed to convince the principal to hold parent meetings in the gym instead of the classrooms because some of the teachers said they were afraid of the parents. I don't think you have to have all Blacks. but what I see has happened here, the white teachers come and they get what they call their tenure, their three years experience or whatever, and then they move out. In fact, that's what they want to do anyway. They really don't want to be here, I don't think.

These comments are not meant to imply nor did the teacher suggest, that only African-American teachers will act in the best interests of African-American students and the community. But the illustration is important -- not only because it represents an instance of bad decision making -- but also because highlights some of the misunderstandings that can result when a diverse faculty bring different life experiences, meanings, and perceptions to their work.

Other teachers provided numerous examples, several concerning expressions of parent and student interest, where differences in life experiences and perceptions shaped teachers' views of the school, or the kinds of changes required to improve teaching and learning. Four teachers noted that the way some African-American parents interacted or failed to interact with school personnel around their children's schooling, caused many of the teachers in their schools, especially those unfamiliar with the community to infer parental disinterest. From what the teachers said about parents, all of the teachers considered parents potential allies who could help accomplish their classroom goals. Consequently, they used various means to establish and maintain contact with parents and encourage their participation. At the beginning of the year, most called or sent letters home informing parents of classroom expectations, describing course requirements, classroom activities and grading procedures,

and letting parents know how to contact them. They sent follow up letters throughout the year, reminding parents of an open house, parent/teacher conferences, describing and securing permission for students to attend field trips. Several teachers explained that some parents, overwhelmed by the problems of daily living, were unable to take a more active role in their children's schooling, and some teachers admitted that poor parents were often made to feel unwelcome in school. More than one teacher commented that even when parents were unavailable, they could usually rely on individuals other than parents to assist them. Most knew how to reach grandparents, aunts, uncles, older brothers, or significant others in a child's life. And all of them commented that unlike other teachers at their schools, they did not expect parents to serve as supplementary teachers or surrogate disciplinarians. One high school teacher, who is currently teaching the children of former students, explained that she spends approximately 2 hours each night calling students' homes, relaying homework assignments to absent students, speaking to parents or other adults about students' successes and failures, answering student questions about assignments, or reviewing material a student may have failed to understand in class. This same teacher commented that her only contact with some parents was when they were angry because their children had been physically hurt. But she interpreted these negatives as evidence of parental concern. Though most of the teachers said they would have desired more parental involvement, and agreed that students would benefit by closer collaboration between parent and teachers, lack of participation did not automatically signal parental disinterest, nor did teachers feel that viable parent teacher relationships would be without conflict.

Another teacher who reported that his views of Black students differ from those the majority of teachers , many but not all white said:

> In my 31 years of teaching, I've never met a student that didn't respect learning. These students, Black kids, even the toughest ones, they respect learning. When they get in my class, they're just as turned on as the rest. I don't think many of the white teachers and some Black ones would agree with my assessment of the students because we have different perceptions of the kids, what they need and want. But, I think my experiences are close to those of the students. After all, I've been Black all of my life and lived in families and communities that aren't too much different from those of my students. But many of the white teachers just can't understand the kids or the community because they haven't lived that experience. They may be able to read about it or learn about it in school, but they will never understand all the nuances that come from simply experiencing it.

While some of the teachers' comments describe different perceptions based on a common cultural background, the preceding quote suggests that other differences -- regional, class -- can cause teachers in the same school to draw different conclusions from the same facts.

**Conclusion**

While interviews with such small numbers make it impossible to generalize, this study suggests a number of conclusions and raises an equal number of questions. Some of these conclusions concern the nature of the reforms themselves while others concern the ways schools have encouraged or discouraged particular groups of teachers from committing themselves to school change efforts.

Experienced teachers were most skeptical, most reluctant, and least likely to be involved in school reform efforts. Because of the nature of the selection process in this study, highly experienced teachers outnumbered less experienced ones. Much of their reluctance stemmed from their school's deep history (Louis & Miles 1990). Staff cohesiveness and repeated cycles of attempted and aborted innovations were the primary factors affecting their commitment to current school restructuring efforts. Six of the teachers perceived a cohesiveness among the faculty in their schools. But, from their perspective, this cohesiveness had been achieved by the common acceptance of an irreversible, negative climate and culture that held the school together. Given this negative school climate and culture, they embraced their marginalized status within the school. All except one of the seven teachers had experienced multiple sequences of school and district wide innovations that had little lasting effect on educational experiences of their students.

When teachers did elect to participate in school reform efforts, their willingness to become involved was influenced by several factors. First was their perception of consistent, fair administrators capable of making responsible, fair, and ethical decisions. The second was their belief that it was possible for faculty to develop a set of shared goals, common culture and vision of the school that would responsive to the student population and community context. All of these were important factors in maintaining teachers' commitment to the collective goals of the institution.

The experience of the first two groups of teachers underscores the need to understand the current but the historical context of schools as well. For both of these groups of teachers, longstanding unsupportive and hostile relationships between colleagues and administrators, cycles of repeated and aborted reforms, and the isolation and alienation that comes from the lack of congruence between teachers' personal values and the school climate, has heightened their skepticism toward the newest innovations and served as a powerful deterrent to participating in school restructuring activities. Occasionally, however, these deterrents were offset by the chance to be a part of programs that were compatible with personal values.

All teachers, without exception, referred to a "golden age" period (Louis & Miles 1990). In contrast to a golden age mythology which focused on school's past excellence and success, this mythology highlighted a period when relationships between school and community were closer, and there was much greater correspondence between the views of the teachers and when the political climate of the 60s and 70s served as a galvanizing force

for academic excellence among African-American students and which has disappeared now that obvious struggle for equal opportunity has been achieved (Comer, 1988; Foster, 1990). These feelings were strongest in interviews of teachers who had worked in schools with racially homogeneous faculties and student bodies and among teachers who had attended such schools as children. Some researchers maintain that adherence to a "golden age" mythology, is conservative and retards innovation because it stresses a return to the past and typically blames students and communities for the declining educational climate at the local school. For these teachers the golden age mythology is cast in a different light. To them it is reminiscent of a period when the schools took greater responsibility for establishing and maintaining working relationships with students and community, and when the political climate facilitated these efforts. The myth of the golden age can be conservative call for a return to ineffective ways. But, as Comer's (1988) research has amply demonstrated particular aspects of the past especially those that attempt to create a closer relationships between community and school can be successfully incorporated into school reform efforts of the present.

A second finding concerns the nature and scope of reform efforts. Schools and school districts provide different opportunities both in terms of the number and kind for teacher involvement. Reform efforts were underway in all of the cities, but in some, innovations were focused only on particular schools. This limited scope of reforms offered some teachers no opportunities for involvement. Other teachers worked in schools which offered limited options for participation, either as members of site-based management, or as participants carrying out a particular aspect of a school reform plan. In this study, experienced teachers were more likely to participate in reforms efforts when their involvement allowed them to work in ways from which they derived personal satisfaction, for example, working closely with students as mentors. To the extent that school and school districts wish to increase the participation of teachers, they should consider providing multiple and more varied opportunities for teacher involvement.

Though research is increasingly acknowledging diversity among students resulting from cultural, ethnic, and social class background, there has been a reluctance to consider the effects of diversity among teachers. By failing to consider the different backgrounds of teachers and the way their different life experiences and understandings shape their response to school reform the research has tended to treat teachers as members of an undistinguished group (Foster, 1990, 1991a, 1991b; King, 1991). While similar background does not insure agreement or disagreement on issues related to school and school reform, this study as well as others, provides some evidence that different backgrounds can affect how teachers in the same school view similar events, and are related to teachers' conceptions of the principal's role, perceptions of what is required to improve education of "at risk" students, ideas about teaching and discipline, and relationships with parents and students (Comer, 1980; Delpit, 1988; Metropolitan Life, 1988; Metz, 1990; Provenzo, 1988). While these teachers acknowledged that teachers from similar backgrounds often disagreed, they pointed to multiple ways in which their own backgrounds caused conflicts between them and teachers with different life experiences. An important example mentioned earlier in this paper

concerns the teachers' educational philosophy, a belief system which for them involved more than one dimension. While these teachers embraced progressive orientations toward pedagogy they distinguished them from the more exacting standard of social behavior they held for students. But they complained that such issues were not considered appropriate and therefore never raised, considered or addressed in discussions of schools or school reforms.

Schools must concede that change will be slow, will involve risk, and may produce some conflict. It will take time to deal with the fundamental differences among teachers. The tendency to implement reforms by administrative decision or even by the majority votes within a site-based management team may produce more rapid change, but it is likely to produce only a superficial not a sustained commitment to change on the part of teachers. Unless conditions for open dialogue exist, even decisions reached by consensus can suppress important differences among teachers. School restructuring efforts are unlikely to succeed if they fail to consider the historical as well as the current context of the school, the relationships among faculty, the number and kind of opportunities provided to teachers for relating to school reform efforts, as well as the effect that different background can have on enabling faculties to achieve common perspectives and shared goals, building a sense of community, and encouraging dialogues that foster permanent change.

The African-American teachers interviewed experienced a variety of efforts at school innovation, and they exhibited different kinds of responses. The main lesson to be learned from these diverse experiences is that unless proposed innovations are consistent with teachers' underlying commitments, personal and cultural perspectives and philosophies of education, we can't expect teachers to express much enthusiasm for change. There seems to be much discussion about changing the way teachers conceive of education, the way they teach, and the roles they assume in schools, but among exemplary teachers, I found not one who experienced any fundamental change in their orientation to education. This suggests that unless reform efforts fit the powerful, pre-existing belief systems of teachers, and unless schools provide more time and are able to create the conditions that will allow for sustained dialogue among teachers to deal with these differences, there will be no transformation of ideas. Without these conditions, reform efforts will be implemented only cosmetically at best.

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